Relationship Strengthening Strategies

Positive student-teacher relationships are associated with positive short and long-term improvements in academic engagement, attendance, and classroom behaviour. Although strong, positive relationships are needed to impact motivation and emotion regulation, they can be difficult to develop with students with high relational needs or challenging behaviours.

Keywords: *relationships, behaviour, emotions, motivation, engagement*

How Student-Teacher Relationships Impact Achievement

Student-teacher relationships are identified as one of the top twenty influences on student learning in John Hattie's Visible Learning. Positive student-teacher relationships impact student achievement by:

- Increasing student comfort in engaging in trial and error and asking for help.
- Improving time spent learning by improving motivation and engagement and reducing disruptive behaviour and/or increasing time on-task.
- Supporting more open communication between student and teacher, which can support teachers in involving students in problem solving any challenges they are having.
- Positively affecting how classmates view and interact with a student.

Brief Relationship Strengthening Strategies

The Establish-Maintain-Restore framework outlined below can be one helpful guide for relationship building and strengthening.

1. *Establish: Use intentional practices to first develop a positive relationship.*
    - Greet students as they enter the classroom
    - Acknowledge their achievements and efforts
    - Use Banking Time or Student-Directed Interactions described later
2. *Maintain: Sustain the quality of the relationship over time by avoiding traps like taking positives for granted or unintentionally becoming more negative in interactions.*
    - Provide positive feedback throughout the day, by using 4:1 ratio of positive feedback to negative comments (redirection, constructive criticism, consequences) or "catching them being good" at least 10 times a day
    - Avoid consequences that will be felt as humiliating or demeaning
    - Demonstrate understanding of their emotions when providing a consequence (e.g., I know you will miss getting to talk with your friends when I move your seat)
    - Send positive notes or make positive calls to the young person's family/caregivers
3. *Restore: intentionally repair harm to the relationship that negative interactions can cause.*

- Meet privately with the student to problem solve
- Allow for forgiveness
- Provide ways to rectify the situation or to try again

Banking Time or 2x 10 Strategy

This is a strategy consists of speaking briefly but consistently with the young person and allowing them to lead the conversation. Following are some specific guidelines for using this strategy:
- Spend two minutes each day for ten days talking with the student
- Allow the young person to lead the conversation
- Be an active listener by conveying interest in their ideas and stories and understanding empathy for their emotions
- Unless the young person brings up the topic, do not discuss classroom assignments

Student-Directed Interaction Strategy

This strategy for younger students involves using a few specific skills for attending to the student's behaviour during a time when the adult can be less directive, such as play or free choice time. See the table for these rapport building skills and examples.

Skills for Attending	Examples
Praise Appropriate Behaviour Let the young person know specifically what they are doing well.	"I like the way you are using so many colours" "I'm proud of you for asking Max for that toy" "Thank you for showing me your drawing"
Narrate to Show Interest Talk about what the young person is doing or saying, like a sport commentator.	Child: "I'm making a sun with these" Adult: "You are using the yellow blocks to make a sun"
Imitate and Follow Following the young person's lead in what they are doing.	If they are drawing a family picture, imitating this yourself. Moving to a new part of the play structure when they do.
Avoid Questions and Commands Any type of command means the young person is not leading the interaction. Commands are sometimes given in the form of a question. Furthermore, when a question is asked, there is an implied demand the young person answers.	Question: "What are you building?" -> Narration: "You put that window on top of the red block" Question: "What should we play next?" -> Narration: "You are finished with the swing. I wonder what you are going to do next."

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